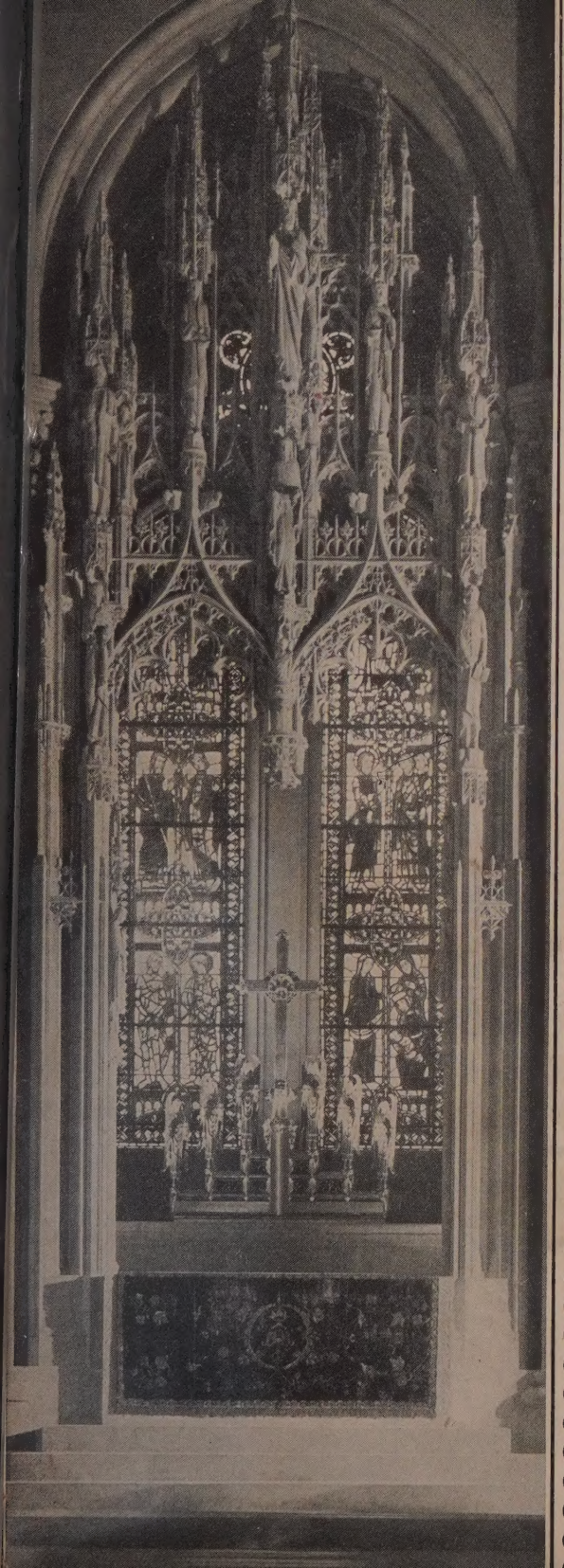

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Crucified by Stupidity

Mendelssohn's "Elijah"

Officers and Committees of the Church

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AUTUMN—BY JEAN FRANÇOIS MILLET

Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Crucified by Stupidity

By Harry Emerson Fosdick

From New Testament days until our own, the Cross of Jesus has been closely associated with the problem of sin. It was because of sin that Jesus had to be crucified, it was by sin that he was crucified—such has been the familiar teaching. Today, on the threshold of another Holy Week, at the center of whose memories the crucifixion stands, we are not minded to deny that long association between the Cross and sin, but we would set beside it another association. Jesus was put to death not simply by sin but by stupidity. It was stupidity that cried, "Crucify him." It was stupidity that nailed the Son of man between two thieves.

Indeed, the Master himself said that. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"—numberless times those words from the Cross have been repeated and yet how little have we seen into their depths! Generally we have interpreted them as an expression of Jesus' magnanimity. In happier days, by word of mouth he had taught his followers to love their enemies and to forgive seventy times seven, and now on Calvary forgiveness rose to heights that words alone can never reach and he pardoned those who slew him. He even made excuse for them, blamed their deed upon their ignorance, asked that they might be forgiven because they knew not what they did. So we have understood those words.

That interpretation clearly is true, but I ask you to look at the words again, not now from the standpoint of the Master's magnanimity but from the standpoint of the men who crucified him. So seen the words take on another aspect. They change their hue. They cease their gentleness and become accusative. Those angry men before Pilate, crying "Crucify him!" did not know what they did. What a tragedy! Those people by the roadside jeering at the staggering figure under his heavy Cross did not know what they did. How terrific a thing stupidity can be! Pilate and Herod and Caiaphas and all the rest who went to bed that night content, thinking that everything now was well done and Jesus finished, did not know what they had done. How appalling an accusation that is! Looked at from the standpoint of Jesus, those words mean one thing; looked at from our standpoint, there is little comfort in them. To crucify Christ stupidly, when we know not what we do,—that is an epitome of the most terrific tragedies of individual experience and human history.

Surely, this thing needs to be said, especially in the churches. In a scientific laboratory, an electrical power-house, a responsible business position, everybody knows that stupidity is ruinous. To say of a man there that he is conscientious and means well, important though that is, does not cover the ground. He must not be stupid. But how often in the churches have we heard men talk as though to be kind-hearted and well-intentioned would solve the spiritual problems of mankind! To see that this will not do, one

needs only look in history at those things of which mankind always will be ashamed. The Athenians who made Socrates drink the hemlock, far from being bad, were among the most earnest, conscientious, religious people of their day. But they stupidly thought Socrates an atheist because his idea of God was so much greater than the popular opinion. They stupidly thought that Socrates was misleading the youth of Athens, he who now, like the Parthenon, is one of the glories of the ancient Greeks. So, in intention, the crusades were not so much wicked as stupid; the people who threatened Galileo with torture were not wicked but stupid; the judges at the trial of Joan of Arc were not bad but senseless, and over the most shameful tragedies of history, as over the Cross of Christ, the judgment stands: "They know not what they do."

When one looks not at history but at our contemporaneous public life, one sees the same fact. The men who cry up war and all its noble consequence are not wicked but stupid. The people who think our economic system can go on without deep-seated changes in the interests of all the people are not wicked but stupid. Look at the record of the United States Senate since the Great War. Part of the trouble may be badness but most of it is stupidity, dangerous stupidity, when wisdom is critically needed. The imposition of the Versailles Treaty on the conquered Germans, binding them and unborn generations to economic servitude, was stupid, and now the Hitlerite reaction against the servitude, with its anti-Semitism, has, as good friends of Germany well may fear, stupidly stolen from that nation a great deal of what it has been regaining in fifteen years.

Look anywhere and see the cruel crosses lifted by stupidity! So Lamennais is quoted by Anatole France as saying that fools are more redoubtable than knaves because knaves take a rest sometimes but fools never do.

We cannot, however, stop with history or with contemporaneous public life. This road leads straight into a man's own soul. Let a man in some hour of honest penitence face those things about which he is most sorry and ashamed, and of what does he accuse himself? Is it not of folly? I can answer for only one man. Always in retrospect the things of which I am most ashamed wring from me the cry, "O Lord, be merciful to me, a fool!"

To many people this way of putting it does not seem especially Christian. Christian teaching has been so absorbed with the problem of sin that in the churches' imagination men have been divided into good and bad, righteous and sinners, rather than into wise and foolish. Listen to Jesus, however. Some people called sinners he called sinners too. They were bad. Others called sinners he called sick. "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." And many more called sinners he called foolish, stupid, blind. "Every one that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand." "Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup." "The hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service unto God." "They are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit." "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

And five of them were foolish, and five were wise." "And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry. But God said unto him, Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee."

You see, what Jesus said from the Cross was not a solitary judgment. Throughout his ministry, the tragedy of his life came from people who knew not what they did.

Let us test this truth on our pulses by applying it to daily life.

For one thing, there is the familiar stupidity of the small, closed mind. That is what crucified Jesus. The Pharisees, with whom from the beginning he had his major difficulties, far from being bad people, were about the best people of their day, strict moralists, earnest religionists, men of profound conscientiousness. The very word "Pharisee" means Puritan. Indeed, looking back on them now, one feels sorry to see so much devoted goodness going to waste, losing its reputation and becoming a byword. Going to waste, did I say? Far worse than that. It was precisely this goodness which crucified Jesus. For, mark it! it was not so much badness that nailed Jesus to the Cross; it was goodness, determined conscientiousness, driven by small, closed minds.

That is not ancient history. Take goodness anywhere—determined, devoted conscientiousness—put it at the disposal of small, closed minds, and you have about the most dangerous force that ever has been let loose into the world.

One can see that even in families. Most parents are not bad, but many of them are stupid. Ask the psychiatrists, then, what ruins children, twists their plastic lives, imposes on them inner handicaps which the finest skill often cannot remove, and they will say it is not so much bad parents—they are not so frequent—as stupid parents. And the crux of the matter lies here: they did not need to be stupid; there was plenty of information available if they had counted it as serious a part of their obligation to be intelligent as to be kind. They knew they ought to be kind. All the moral voices that ever spoke to them about parenthood told them to be kind. Nature herself said that. But not enough voices have told us that to love children without being intelligent about it can damn them as utterly as brutality can. How many little children are being crucified today by conscientious stupidity!

One sees our truth evidenced in the churches. Narrow, sectarian Christians with small, closed minds are not bad people. Upon the contrary, they are often very good people, but they are something else which is just as ruinous to the cause of Christ as being bad—they are stupid. As Paul said long ago concerning those who fought against his life work,—an inclusive Christian church that would take Gentiles in,—"I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge." That is ruinous. So good people, facing the profound spiritual needs of this generation with minds closed to new truth, blind to great issues, obstinate against new methods, are crucifying Christ afresh in his church, not by wickedness but by stupidity.

Indeed, if our American democracy as a whole should go to pieces, do you

think sin chiefly would be the guilty conspirator? That would not be half the story. Nothing can destroy our American democracy except our own stupidity—but that can.

One suspects a certain discouragement in some as they face this way of putting the matter, as though they would say, If we were only bad we might improve ourselves and do better, but if one is stupid what can one do about that? Such an attitude shows how neglected this theme has been. We do not need to be so stupid as we are. We are needlessly stupid because we have not been taught to count it a serious part of our moral obligation to be intelligent as parents, as churchmen, as patriots, as citizens of the world. A salesgirl in a small shop said recently to my friend: "This world crisis has waked me up. I never before had thought or read about public affairs. I never even bothered about how I voted. But now I see that we are all sunk unless we all think. Believe me, I am reading and thinking now." Just so! we do not need to be so stupid as we are.

If we are to call ourselves Christians, we had better not be stupid. Who was it said that his disciples were to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves? Jesus. To many people that does not sound like Jesus at all—"wise as serpents." But it sounds like him to those who know him. "Harmless as doves," that is, men of goodwill, his followers were to be, but also wise as serpents. I wonder if, when Jesus said that, he foresaw that one day he would be crucified by men who knew not what they did.

Again, there is the stupidity, not only of small, closed minds, but of false choices. Jerusalem that last week, like all the rest of us all the time, was confused by competing interests—the financial interests of the money-changers, the orthodox interests of the Pharisees, the concern of the Sadducees to keep on the right side of Rome, the fanaticism of the Zealots against Rome, and then Jesus himself, apparently at odds with all of them. Something had to be eliminated. Some of those interests had to be sacrificed to others. So they dropped Christ. And at last, at the most dramatic moment in Pilate's court, they found themselves choosing between a murderer and Jesus, and saying, "Release unto us Barabbas." Wicked? Yes, but stupid.

Nevertheless, let any man here look deep into his own soul and regard those things which shame him most and see if they are not associated with such choices. To have some Christ in our experience where we might have welcomed him and stupidly to choose some Barabbas instead, and then, when it is too late, to wake up to see what fools we have made of ourselves—that is a familiar tragedy.

Indeed, one thinks of that today, not simply as a Christian but as a citizen. How can one look on this current American scene and not see the imminent danger of our loss from stupid choices? To start with a mere detail, we Americans are letting ourselves be shot up on every side by criminal gangs with machine guns. The big business of the gangs is carried off with machine guns. Couldn't we stop that? Of course we could. Machine guns are manufactured in definite places and sold through definite channels and everybody knows that no private citizen has any legitimate business with a machine gun, so that there is no conceivable excuse for their being obtainable by private individuals. One effort after another has

been made to put a stop to this. All efforts have failed. One wonders if the manufacturers of munitions have been too powerful. So we go on being shot up by machine guns. Wicked? Yes, but stupid!

Or consider a larger matter in the spectacle which we are making of ourselves with reference to the return of liquor. Sometimes one wishes that one could get all the "wets," now that they are in power, together and talk sense to them, something like this:

We agree that prohibition has broken down. Some of us did not want it in the first place. But we call your attention to the fact that the ultimate responsibility for prohibition was not the prohibitionists but the saloon. That was the dirtiest, most disreputable element in our society. It became at last so intolerable that the whole nation rose up and cast it out. And now that prohibition has failed as a method of dealing with the liquor traffic, which always has been dangerous, lawless, and corrupt, see what you "wets" are doing. Apparently you have learned nothing. You are up to the old game again. Here in this state you are trying once more to establish corrupt relationships between politics and the liquor traffic. You who so solemnly swore you did not want the saloon back again are doing everything within your power to get it back again. Wicked? Yes, but stupid! We in this country who care not for prohibition but for temperance are not all dead yet, not by a long sea-mile! We want decent laws, laws that will shut out the old saloon, laws that will divorce the liquor traffic from politics, laws that will keep the private profit motive from debauching the appetite of youth to make saloonkeepers and brewers rich. We want decent laws and if you, the "wets," now being in power, will not give them to us, you are not half so much bad as foolish, because as sure as consequence follows cause, the inevitable Nemesis will fall on you like a thunderbolt.

You see what we are trying to say. There are so many things in life which we call wicked, which we might get rid of if we had sense enough to see that they are stupid. Who can look at war in this modern world and not see that it is stupid? Who can look on economic methods doing to us what our economic methods have been doing and not see their stupidity? As for personal character, I beg leave to speak for a moment especially to you young people. I plead with you—dare I say it?—not so much against wickedness as against stupidity. You have a great chance. How many older ones there are in this congregation who wish they had again the chance that you have now! Your reputations are not smirched. Your character is still sound. You have not yet said, Release unto me Barabbas! You have not yet crucified your Christ. I pray you, stay your hand if you are tempted to. To build a strong character, to live a high life, to undergird your soul with great faiths, to dedicate your life to noble ends, to keep your Christ and let Barabbas go—that is not simply being good, that is being intelligent. "Everyone therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock."

Once more, there is the stupidity of the short look. The essence not only of character but of intelligence is involved in a man's ability to sacrifice an immediate gratification for the sake of an ultimate satisfaction. What calamity falls upon us because of our stupid refusal to do that! You remember how the Master put it on that Palm Sunday long ago, when he had heard Hosannahs from the crowd but, looking on the Holy City, saw clearly the shadow of his Cross upon it: "If thou hadst known . . . the things which belong unto thy peace!" One often says *that* when a man comes to him for confession, after trouble has taken possession of the field—If you had known what be-

longs unto your peace! Of course, we all feel the lure of the immediate. Immediate sensation, immediate gain, immediate explosion of emotion—from a youngster eating green apples to an old fool whose green apples take on a more mature form, every son of man knows the terrific lure of the immediate. Probably it is the chiefest single cause of human folly.

I wish I could help some one here, especially some young person, to take a long look. Dealing as I habitually do with the intimate affairs of young persons, I find myself constantly saying to them, not "Don't be bad"—they are not bad—but "Don't make fools of yourselves." And never until I started to preach this sermon did I realize how Scriptural that counsel is.

Far back in the 1840's a Mediterranean immigrant landed in Australia, bearing as a memento of his home a flower pot with a prickly pear. Who could have guessed what would come of that? For the prickly pear is now one of the important affairs of the Australian government, the fight against the prickly pear one of the considerable items in its budget, and, despite all that they can do, the prickly pear steadily gains each year over a square kilometre more of ground. If they had known what belonged unto their peace!

What is your prickly pear? My young friend, this is a law-abiding universe. You cannot get away with anything. Says the New Testament, "Be not deceived,"—that is, Don't fool yourself,—"God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

At any rate, Jesus was right about those men who crucified him, was he not? Indeed they did not know what they did. Nearly two thousand years have passed since Calvary and he who hung there has become to millions of us the Lord of life.

I wish I could for a moment make you see that Cross. When Lincoln's body was brought from Washington to Illinois it passed through Albany and, as it was carried through the street, they say a colored woman stood upon the curb and lifted her little son as far as she could reach above the heads of the crowd and was heard to say to him, "Take a long look, honey. He died for you." So if I could I would lift up your spirit to see Calvary. Take a long look. He died for you. But with all our gratitude, there is warning there. He was nailed on that Cross by human stupidity. They knew not what they did.

PRAYER

Eternal God, our Father, we who have so often repented of our sins would repent of our folly. God be merciful unto us, fools! Amen.

Dr. Fosdick preached the foregoing sermon, April 9, 1933.

Prayer

By Harry Emerson Fosdick

Eternal Spirit, well of living water, harvest field from which comes the bread of life, we bring to Thee our souls, thankful and needy, radiant and cast down, glad and penitent. Could we have lived by temporal bread alone we had not sought Thee. Deep beneath the needs which earthly things can satisfy, Thou seest clearly and we dimly feel the hunger which Thou alone canst meet. Grant us such willing surrender and receptivity that to us may freely come the insight and wisdom, the grace and power, without which no man can fully live.

We pray for a courageous faith. Our fathers walked through days of tumult when the future was unsure. So walk we. Give us a creative faith such that Thy Spirit in us, brooding over chaos, may bring order out of it. Grant us inward resources of spiritual power that we be not submerged in difficulty but may rise above it, be superior to it, and carry off a spiritual triumph in the face of it. Make of us radiant, victorious personalities that shall commend to all the world the faith which we profess.

We pray for vision. See how the blind lead the blind and fall into the ditch! Raise up for this people, we beseech Thee, leaders who shall see a little way ahead and know what Israel ought to do. In our personal estate grant us insight that shall make plainer the path before us until problems grow less complex and duties more clear. Have we not come to Thee, Thou source of light, that we might be children of the light and not walk in darkness? Therefore grant vision to Thy servants' inner eyes. We pray for a wide outlook—for eternal horizons around our daily duties. We grow obsessed with difficulties and tasks near at hand until our perspectives become narrow and our horizons shut us in. Lift us up to a far outlook. Upon the bleak hills that surround some souls today put horses and chariots of fire. Expand our sympathies, overflow our doubts, increase our faith! Lift us to such an altitude that we may go forth from this place new men and new women in a new world.

Thou seest, we ask Thee for no soft, weak comfort. We request of Thee not life made easy but inward fortification and wide margins of resource around our need. Especially we pray for those in perplexity over practical estate. We cannot live by bread alone but we cannot live without it. When, not for ourselves only but for our families and friends, the human need is clamorous, canst Thou measure our agony? Open the free channels of goodwill among this people. Touch our generosity until like a fountain it shall overflow. Grant that even as we pray for those hurt by penury we may have imagination to see them and unselfishness to assist them.

We beseech Thee also for those hard pressed by moral temptation. O God, the upward path is very steep for human feet. It is easier to go down than to rise. Surround some spirit in Thy presence here with Thy protective care.

(*Continued on page 237*)

Mendelssohn's "Elijah"

By Harold Vincent Milligan

To many people "oratorio" means Handel's "Messiah" and Mendelssohn's "Elijah." These two great works are probably sung more often than all other oratorios combined. Of course, Handel's great masterpiece remains the favorite, but Mendelssohn's more modern work is a good second in popular affection and far outdistances all competitors in number of performances. It must be admitted that tradition and habit play an important part in the regard which the public holds for these two works, but making all due allowance for the power of habit and familiarity, there must be a great vitality in the music itself to keep these two oratorios so constantly before the public for so many years.

The Handel work is much the older, preceding "Elijah" by a century. Of this music it may truthfully be said (if such a word may be applied to any music) that it is "immortal." The Hallelujah Chorus, "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth," "He Shall Feed His Flock," these and other numbers from "Messiah" have imbedded themselves in the consciousness of all music-lovers in a way which time seems to intensify rather than weaken. Much the same may be said of "If With All Your Hearts," "O Rest In the Lord," "Cast Thy Burden," "Hear Ye Israel," "He, Watching Over Israel," and other numbers from "Elijah." Handel's music is cast in the idiom of the early Eighteenth Century, but Mendelssohn's phrases, though written nearly ninety years ago, seem to belong to the present day. There is a quality which musicians call "Mendelssohnian," sometimes using the word in a slightly derogatory way as though to imply that to be "Mendelssohnian" is to be a a little trite, a trifle commonplace, overlooking the fact that it was the tremendous vitality of Mendelssohn's music which stamped itself so ineradicably upon his and future generations, raising up a host of imitators. It is the swarm of pseudo-Mendelssohns who are to blame for the "bromidic" quality which we seem to feel sometimes in Mendelssohn's writing. We have heard so much imitation Mendelssohn that we are apt to forget how potent the original is.

I do not know that authorities have ever argued as to which is Mendelssohn's masterpiece, but if such an argument ever takes place, I am prepared to support the claims of "Elijah" as being his magnum opus. With the exception of the great Johann Sebastian Bach, I doubt if any man ever wove a contrapuntal choral web so skillfully as Mendelssohn. His writing for orchestra, for piano and various chamber-music combinations is always characterized with the utmost skill of workmanship, but it seems to me that his writings for vocal chorus show his genius at its best. In his appreciation of vocal line and his contrapuntal ingenuity, he never loses sight of melodic quality and harmonic pattern. An analysis of some of the chorus writing in "Elijah" and "Saint Paul" sets a model for future composers to strive for.

There is a dramatic quality in the music of "Elijah" which makes one wonder what Mendelssohn might have done if he had been successful in his life-long search for a good opera libretto. Like Beethoven, his critical taste rejected many that were offered to him. In his earliest years he wrote a number of works for stage performance, but they were immature and in most cases intended only for amateur performance. In later years he was constantly seeking for a good opera libretto, without success. Perhaps it is just as well, for before Mendelssohn's untimely death, the great Richard Wagner had already appeared upon the scene and was in the very process of completely altering the whole aspect of operatic music, (indeed in many respects of all music), so that all music bears the date-line, "Before Wagner" or "After Wagner."

The dramatic quality in "Elijah," which is undoubtedly an important element in the longevity of its popular appeal, is not by any means an accident. It is imbedded in the libretto and its presence there is due to the composer himself who prepared his own libretto after being dissatisfied with several attempts which had been made for him.

Particularly in the First Part is the dramatic element to the fore. In fact "Elijah" has been mounted as an opera, with scenery, costumes and action. The "plot," wholly aside from its religious significance, is one of the world's great stories, a saga out of the past that would hold its own with the great myths of the world's childhood, even if it had no connection with our Bible. The composer has put together his Biblical texts and brief interpolations with unerring skill and the music intensifies the situations with compelling power.

Beginning at once with the baleful prophecy of Elijah, "As God the Lord of Israel liveth, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word," the music moves on swiftly through the wailing chorus of the distressed people, "Help, Lord, wilt Thou quite destroy us?" and the voice of Obadiah pleads, "If with all your hearts ye truly seek Me." Then follows the departure of Elijah to the wilderness and the raising of the Widow's Son, a duet between baritone and soprano which is one of the most beautiful episodes in the whole work. Elijah returns to Israel, and there follows the scene upon Mount Carmel, where the prophet challenges the priests of Baal to bring fire upon the altar. The choruses of the Baal priests, the taunts of Elijah, the increasing frenzy of the priests, ending in a wild shout, "Hear and answer!" provide a dramatic picture which few operas can equal. The music moves so swiftly, surging on to its climax so irresistibly, one cannot but feel that it was conceived in a white heat of inspiration when the pen could hardly follow the leaping imagination of the writer. The excitement of the Baal priests is followed by a pause of complete silence, and then the prayer of "Elijah," "Lord God of Abraham," with its quiet serenity and confidence, provides the most striking contrast. The descent of the fire from heaven, the penitence and prayer of the people, the scene of the "little cloud no bigger than a man's hand," and the chorus of rejoicing when "the waters gather, they rush along" bring the drama of the First Part to a thrilling close.

The Second Part is not so obviously

dramatic, although it contains the contest between Jezebel and Elijah. Its real significance however is the psychological contest, the struggle of Elijah in his own soul, the despair of "It Is Enough" and the tone-pictures of the great chorus, "Lo, God the Lord Passed By."

It was this situation which first attracted Mendelssohn to the subject of Elijah and from this point, backward and forward, he prepared his libretto and planned his music. His earlier oratorio, "Saint Paul," composed to his own libretto at the age of twenty-seven, had been enormously popular in Germany and England. This had been followed four years later by the "Hymn of Praise," and Mendelssohn was everywhere acknowledged to be the greatest composer of oratorio. Librettos, suggestions and ideas were submitted to him at various times but he was very critical of them and had very definite ideas as to what he wanted. It had not been his intention to prepare his own text for "Saint Paul," but its success strengthened him in his conviction that his ideas as to the framework for his music were correct. His friend Marx had agreed to provide the text for "Saint Paul," and Mendelssohn was in turn to write a libretto on "Moses" for which Marx was to provide the music. Mendelssohn wrote his libretto at once, but disagreed with Marx as to the style of "Saint Paul," and the book was finally abandoned, to be finished by Mendelssohn himself. The text of "Moses" was never set to music and is still in the archives of the Mendelssohn family.

Mendelssohn at one time considered writing an oratorio on the subject of "Saint Peter." His correspondence contains frequent references to his search for a good oratorio text, the first mention of "Elijah" being in 1837, just after the production of "Saint Paul." He rejected a libretto submitted to him at that time and the subject was not mentioned again until 1840. He was unable to persuade any of his friends to prepare a book for him and nothing came of the plans, although it is quite likely that the idea was germinating in the mind of the composer during these years.

In 1845 he was invited to write an original work for the Birmingham (England) Festival and to conduct the first performance. He accepted the invitation and set to work at once on the text and music of "Elijah." He was living a very busy life at this time and there were many interruptions. Several times he despaired of finishing the work in time for the Festival, but in spite of the many other demands upon his time and strength, he worked at high pressure. The whole work, text and music, was completed in every detail in ten months. The First Part was ready in about seven months, the plates engraved and the music sent to England to rehearse. The whole Second Part was written in three months and each number, as finished, was copied and sent to England. The chorus had only two months to learn their part, and some of the chorus music did not arrive until one week before the scheduled performance. The soloists were sent manuscript copies of the vocal part without accompaniment and on account of numerous corrections which the composer had put in at the last minute, these were difficult to read. There were also numerous places in the orchestral score which were difficult to decipher and the anxiety of those involved in the performance must have been extreme.

In spite of this apparent haste, the performance, on the morning of August 26, 1846, was tremendously successful. Mendelssohn received a great ovation. He was delighted with the chorus and orchestra, but not so well pleased with the soloists. He thought the soprano was "too lady-like" and reduced everything to "mere prettiness." It is well known that he wrote the soprano part for Jenny Lind and was greatly disappointed when she could not be induced to sing the first performance on account of a quarrel which she had had with her English manager. The reiteration of the note F sharp in the aria, "Hear Ye Israel" is said to be due to Mendelssohn's great admiration for that particular note in Jenny Lind's voice. It is sad to note that he never heard her sing it, although she made her first appearance as an oratorio singer in this part in 1848, after the composer's death.

After the performance in Birmingham, Mendelssohn made a number of revisions in the score and the music as we now know it was published the following year, 1847.

Mendelssohn had written his masterpiece under great pressure and with great enthusiasm. He wrote to his sister, "I shall be glad indeed if it turns out one-half as good as I think it is." At another time he wrote, "Sometimes when the music is going well, I feel as if I could jump to the ceiling."

It is quite possible that the strain of writing "Elijah" and the added strain of the journey to England and the last crucial rehearsals, together with the responsibility of conducting the first performance, may have had a serious effect on the composer's health. He had lived at white heat. His mental exertions for years had been prodigious, he had produced great music in all forms and in greatest profusion. His friends in England were dismayed at his frail and worn appearance on this visit. He was feted by royalty and surrounded by admiring friends and the public, but his obvious desire was to go home to rest. But he had taken (as Thackeray said of himself) "too many crops out of his brain." The genius was still there but the physical energy was exhausted. Less than a year after the first performance of "Elijah," Mendelssohn was dead at the age of thirty-seven.

(*Continued from page 233*)

Remind us in time that it is easier to prevent evil than to recover from it. Save us from dishonoring our lives. So challenge us with the need of the world that we may contribute to it at least one good life, adventurous for righteousness.

So in personal want, in family perplexity, in secret temptation, in earnest desire for Thy Kingdom on earth, we commit ourselves to Thee. in the spirit of Christ. Amen.

Officers and Committees of The Riverside Church

We are publishing in this issue of THE CHURCH MONTHLY, as is our custom each Fall, a list of the officers of the church and the various auxiliary organizations, together with the committees appointed by these respective groups.

This roster will help the average church member to become acquainted with the people who are most active in the leadership of the congregation. It will also serve to acquaint our members and friends in the congregation and the community with the many fields of activity and interest which are open to us. The personnel of these committees is continually changing as new members and interested friends come into the congregation. A check of the list published this year against that which was published a year ago discloses a very active situation. We trust that all who come and go in The Riverside Church will think of these organizations and groups as potential opportunities for them to be of service in and through the church.

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Autumn

Our frontispiece this month, "Autumn," by Jean François Millet (1814-1875), is made available through the facilities of the Metropolitan Museum of Art where the original painting is to be found. Other canvases by Millet which have found popular favor include The Angelus (1859), The Sower (1850), The Gleaners (1857), The Man with the Hoe (1863). Drawings by Millet have also found great favor, among them being "Vine Dresser Resting" and "Woman Churning."

The Church Monthly

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WEDNESDAY EVENINGS AT THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH

FALL OF 1933

TOPIC: CHRIST OR MARS?

November 8: The Practical Task: Translating International Ideals into Action.

Dr. Raymond B. Fosdick, President of the League of Nations Association; author of "The Old Savage in the New Civilization."

November 15: The Basic Question: Is the Peace Movement a Delusion?

Dr. James T. Shotwell, Professor of History at Columbia University; author of "War as an Instrument of National Policy," and "Labor as an International Problem."

November 22: The Knotty Problem: Economic Issues in World Relations.

Dr. Edmund E. Day, Director for Social Sciences at Rockefeller Foundation; member of Staff of Experts at London Economic Conference.

November 29: Preparatory Service.

December 6: The Crux of the Conflict: Nationalism vs. Internationalism.

Mr. James G. McDonald, Chairman of the Board, Foreign Policy Association.

December 13: The Threatening Catastrophe: War or Peace in the Pacific?

Mrs. F. Louis Slade, Vice-Chairman of the N. Y. League of Women Voters; Member of American Council, Institute of Pacific Relations.

These meetings begin promptly at 8.00 o'clock in the Assembly Hall. Dr. Fosdick will preside and introduce the speakers. The public is welcome.

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OF

The Church Monthly

▽

Books by Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick on a great variety of subjects are listed below. Any book will be sent postpaid by The Church Monthly on the receipt of the list price.

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Superficial Optimists, the Peril of a Serious Time
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